

Online Research @ Cardiff

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/75042/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Murray-Miller, Gavin ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4543-4980> 2014. Neither reformers nor réformés: The construction of French modernity in the Nineteenth Century. *Historical Reflections Reflexions Historiques* 40 (3) , pp. 44-67. 10.3167/hrrh.2014.400303 file

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/hrrh.2014.400303>
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.3167/hrrh.2014.400303>>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies.

See

<http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



Neither Reformers Nor *Réformés*:
The Construction of French Modernity in the Nineteenth Century

Gavin Murray-Miller

In his scathing criticism of secularism and liberal democracy published in 1866, the Catholic polemicist Louis Veuillot saw fit to bundle his denunciation of all things profane and irreligious under the rubric of “the vague monster everyone calls ‘modern society’.” Never modest, Veuillot fashioned himself a true believer in an age of rampant skepticism and heresy, “the last Christian . . . at the end of the torturous days when the insolence of man stupidly rejoices as the stars fall down upon him.” While French liberals and democrats of the period wrote off Veuillot’s diatribe as yet another example of clerical resistance to the progressive social and cultural changes occurring within nineteenth-century European society, his

pronouncement that modernity constituted a “vague monster” and “fantastic entity,” as he put it, continues to possess a contemporary ring.¹ Scholars have consistently employed the term “modernity” while expressing reservations over its legitimacy and import, investing it with both real and imaginary properties that have problematized its use as an analytical category for historians.² In the twenty-first century, modernity continues to assume the form of Veuillot’s “vague monster,” one that seemingly embodies all potentialities while nonetheless eluding definitional clarity.

Yet for many of Veuillot’s contemporaries, modernity, although subject to varying ideological interpretations, could hardly be construed as a “fantastic entity.” The social and political transformations wrought by France’s traumatic revolutionary experience in the late eighteenth century—not to mention the economic changes occurring due to industrialization and the transportation revolution of the nineteenth century—had, critics argued, brought about a corresponding change in the sentiments and perspective of the country, commencing a period in which interests and social conventions, just as much as politics, were subject to what the German writer Friedrich von Schlegel described as “the hasty revolutions of the fleeting day.”³ The savant Hippolyte Taine complained that the French public interminably clamored for the “new, salient and unexpected” while treating the past with disregard and boredom.⁴ What was true of fashion was equally true of politics. “We demolished the past,” Taine claimed in 1861 while speculating on the impact of the French Revolution, “and all had to be done over again.”⁵ Severed from their roots, the French could only appreciate the transitory and contingent, seeing

¹ Louis Veuillot, *L’illusion libérale* (Versailles: Editions de Paris, 2005), 60, 48, 57.

² See: “Historians and the Question of ‘Modernity’,” *The American Historical Review* 116:3 (June 2011): 631-33.

³ Quoted in Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 127.

⁴ Hippolyte Taine, *Essais de critique et d’histoire* (Paris: Hachette, 1900), 380.

⁵ Hippolyte Taine, *Notes on England*, trans., Edward Hyams (London: Thames-Hudson, 1957), 126.

behind them a past of ruin and destruction with little consequence in the here and now. “In France, we are neither reformers nor *réformés*,” the Saint-Simonian mystic Prosper Enfantin conceded in 1840. “We love new habits and have no desire for patching up old holes.”⁶

Desire for novelty encouraged a certain distaste for the old and *passé*, but it could equally invite reflection on the sheer fragility of the past and sense of loss which modern time engendered, and such ambivalence was true of fashion as it was of physical places. Building projects during the middle of the century in French cities proceeded with little concern for the historic and familiar. Feeling nostalgic on a clement afternoon in the autumn of 1864, the journalist Victor Fournel decided to walk across Paris and revisit a small house which he had frequented on occasion in the past. “I wanted only to stroll by on the pavement slowly,” he claimed, “raise my eyes to the third floor and look at the place.” Arriving at the location, the journalist was appalled to find that where the building had once stood was now a vacant lot covered with a fresh layer of smoldering tar. “Even the street had disappeared,” Fournel remarked in near disbelief as he surveyed the area.⁷ The experience of the writer and renowned gastronome Charles Monselet was hardly any different. The Paris that he had come to know and love was quickly vanishing in the midst of state efforts to beautify and modernize the city: “day by day, the streets are disappearing, the buildings known for their history [*ancienneté*] and the memories associated with them are being demolished.”⁸ The modern was, in Monselet’s conjecture, a beast devouring history and memory that would, in time, efface all that had come before it. Confronted with a general perception “that anything and everything may disappear,” as Pierre Nora has put it, artists and writers of the period felt obliged to capture and preserve what time would ineluctably diminish, whether through realistic accounts, accurate depictions of

⁶ *Œuvres de Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin* (Aalen: O. Zeller, 1964), 32:47.

⁷ Victor Fournel, *Paris nouveau et Paris future* (Paris: J. Lecoffre, 1865), 77.

⁸ Charles Monselet, *Les Ruines de Paris* (Paris: L. de Potter, 1857), 2:43.

physical places or the use of new photographic technologies.⁹ Such practices would become central to recording a “history of the present,” an act intimately associated with what scholars have broadly interpreted as the “modern experience.”¹⁰

Detached from the past, life, opinions and perspectives in France became preoccupied with the “ephemeral, fugitive, [and] contingent”—elements which the poet Charles Baudelaire intimately associated with the advent of *la modernité*.¹¹ Homilies to the modern and professions of faith in the “modern spirit” resonated amongst an entire generation and found expression in a variety of cultural, social and political projects throughout the nineteenth century. By mid-century, French outlooks revealed an infatuation with a cult of the modern, a trend first inspired by the revolutionary political culture of the late-eighteenth century that had set out to break irrevocably with the past and create a radically new type of society with no historical precedent. In his *Dictionnaire de la langue française* published in the 1870s, the positivist philosopher and lexicographer Émile Littré listed the word “*modernité*” as a neologism dating from the late 1860s first coined by the literary critic Théophile Gautier.¹² In actuality, Gautier had employed the term at various times over the previous decade in his reviews, applauding works that were “of [their] time” and, by consequence, pregnant with elements of “*modernité*.”¹³ Yet Littré was, nonetheless, correct in accenting the word’s neologic quality, identifying it as a distinct product of a culture and period captivated by all things new and modern. “Modernity immediately seduces us with its intrinsic charms,” admitted the literary critic René Doumic at the turn of the

⁹ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History,” *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989):7; Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present*; Shelley Rice, *Parisian Views* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

¹⁰ Matt K. Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 16-17, 206. The reconceptualization of space and time and its relationship to social practice has also been examined by Wolfgang Kaschuba, *Die Überwindung der Distanz: Zeit und Raum in der europäischen Moderne* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004).

¹¹ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” in *My Heart Laid Bare and Other Prose Writings*, trans., Norman Cameron (New York: Huskell House, 1975), 37.

¹² Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Versailles: Partenaires livres, 2004), 4:3932.

¹³ For example, see: *La Presse*, 23 November 1853.

twentieth century, “deriving from a secret conformity with our tastes.”¹⁴ For Doumic, a writer who came of age in an intellectual milieu where modernity not only symbolized an idea but a complete way of life and thinking, the appeal of *la modernité* was a given.

Words are a particular type of cultural artifact. They not only provide insight into the sentiments of the age in which they were produced but also offer a window into the conceptualization and ordering of an entire mental landscape constructed and assembled through speech.¹⁵ The fact that intellectuals and elites began to think and speak in new terms of time and temporality did not imply there existed some transcendental meaning or truth within their judgments or that modernity had simply arrived at a given time.¹⁶ The increasing penchant to interpret the world in qualitatively different terms from the past and identify certain attributes, sensibilities and outlooks as inherently “modern” were products of a culture and cultural vocabulary that prized all that was modern to the exclusion of the *ancien* and obsolete. This style of language and representation possessed, moreover, a specific social context and import as well. It constituted a discourse employed primarily by cultural and political elites of the period who came to interpret the modern in accordance with their own social expectations and worldview. It was telling when the anarchist poet Arthur Rimbaud sneered at the pretense and smugness of bourgeois society in one of his poems during the 1870s, remarking sarcastically that in France “one must be absolutely modern.”¹⁷

Rimbaud was one among many French intellectuals who, whether in laudatory or deprecatory terms, saw fit to equate the bourgeois with all that was modern. Such perceptions

¹⁴ René Doumic, “La manie de la modernité,” *Revue des Deux Mondes* (Paris: Bureau de la Revue des Deux Mondes, 1898), 148:925.

¹⁵ See: Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), xv-xxiv.

¹⁶ As Jacques Le Goff has noted, temporal consciousness is not naturally given or implicit in and of itself. It is a construction dependent on a certain understanding of time that relies on an opposition between past and present. See: *Histoire et Mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 25.

¹⁷ Arthur Rimbaud, “Farewell,” *A Season in Hell*, trans., Louise Varèse (New York: New Directions, 1961), 89.

have been sustained in contemporary analyses as well, with purportedly “bourgeois” forms of culture, sociability and productivity standing as definitive traits of modern life and society.¹⁸ The import of this bourgeois modernity has, moreover, informed the perspectives of so-called “modernization theorists” who have laid emphasis on the role capitalism and industrialization—the twin hallmarks of a nominally bourgeois society—have played in a universal modernizing process.¹⁹ This narrative correlating capitalist development and industrial growth with modernity has rightly been criticized for promoting a vision of global homogenization and relying upon conceptions of a “modern” western identity with universal pretensions.²⁰ One could equally accuse modernization theorists of replicating the discourse of nineteenth-century elites who had no qualms with lauding the cultural and technological achievements of their own societies while condemning the savagery and backwardness of non-European cultures. Within such perspectives, modernity has exceedingly amounted to a monolith shaped by a particular idea of society defined through its dynamic and innovative possibilities. This understanding fails, however, to recognize that modernity is the product of a certain cultural vocabulary that prizes and valorizes these exact qualities; in essence, that it was nominally “modern” societies which first articulated this very conception of modernity, seeing in it a reflection of their own power, prestige and eminence. In this respect, rather than a condition, modernity constitutes a particular way of describing and

¹⁸ See: T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 50-70; Jeanne Gaillard, *Paris, la ville: 1852-1870* (Paris: Champion, 1977), 267-70; Whitney Walton, *France and The Crystal Palace: Bourgeois Taste and Artisan Manufacture in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

¹⁹ See: Wilbert E. Moore, *Industrialization and Labor: Social Aspects of Economic Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1951); Clark Kerr, John T. Dunlop, Frederick Harrison and Charles Myers, *Industrialism and Industrial Man: The Problems of Labor and Management in Industrial Growth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960).

²⁰ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 113; Dean Tipps, “Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A Critical Prospective,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 12 (1973): 199-226.

talking about the world that is, in its very nature, self-referential.²¹ As John Camaroff has pointedly argued, “in itself, ‘modernity’ has no a priori telos or content.” It is not an analytical category, but an “ideological formation” that is constructed and reproduced to revere certain practices and values while denigrating others.²²

Once modernity is stripped of its essentializing qualities, all that remains are the varying discourses, ideological forms and cultural representations which give substance to this construction. The presupposed modern monolith vanishes, “melting into air,” as Marx would have it. In light of its ideological and discursive properties, modernity has perennially been tied to an idiom of newness prized by cultural and social elites in the western world. It has underwritten and sustained a particular type of discursive power capable of representing socially-particular behavioral norms and values in universal and humanitarian terms while furnishing a rationale for their forcible imposition on others.²³ In its French variant, this universality has been intimately linked with the advent of bourgeois social primacy, making modern society virtually synonymous with the contours of a bourgeois worldview and ethos.

Although “modern society” did connote a world defined by certain “bourgeois” interests and aspirations, the coupling of bourgeoisie and French modernity frequently obscured the more nuanced relationship that existed between social identity and time in the nineteenth-century French imagination, and to conflate the two concepts would be erroneous. As late as the 1840s, Prosper Enfantin could claim that modern society remained vague and ill-defined, and this at time when “bourgeois” had become a common facet of public and social discourse in France. In

²¹ See: Carol Gluck, “The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now,” *The American Historical Review* 116:3 (June 2011): 676-77.

²² “Interview With John and Jean Camaroff,” *NAB: Newsletter of African Studies at Batreuth University*, 1:1 (2002): 3-4.

²³ Huri İslamoğlu and Peter C. Perdue, “Introduction,” in *Shared Histories of Modernity: China, India and The Ottoman Empire*, ed., Huri İslamoğlu and Peter C. Perdue (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), 1-20.

Enfantin's estimation, modern society "demanded a new speech" if it was to become a salient and living idea.²⁴ The development and elaboration of this "new speech" that would construct, convey and discursively possess modern time and society was still in the making at mid-century and it would not be until bourgeois identity underwent a crisis that prevailing views of modernity and modern society would become staples of nineteenth-century French public and cultural discourse.

In France, the bourgeoisie never accommodated the strict social schema proposed by Marxist philosophy. Whereas Marx saw the bourgeoisie as an explicit social group brought into existence by industrialization and the accumulation of capital, such socio-economic interpretations did not necessarily gel with the realities of nineteenth-century French economic and social development.²⁵ Over the course of the century, French industry progressed at a relatively slower pace in comparison to Great Britain and the United States, and the preservation of more traditional forms of artisanal manufacturing matched with a primarily agricultural economy entailed that a bourgeois class controlling the means of production was largely absent in France.²⁶ This is not to suggest that the term "bourgeois" had no relevance for French society. Indeed, the character and origins of the bourgeoisie was widely debated and speculated upon throughout the early nineteenth century.²⁷ Yet "bourgeois" rarely constituted the class of producers and entrepreneurs that Marx believed to make up the new ruling class in industrial society. Rather, it connoted a mark of social distinction which encompassed a broad array of

²⁴ *Œuvres*, 33:28.

²⁵ For Marx's interpretation of French society and politics at mid-century, see: Karl Marx, *Class Struggles in France 1848-1850* (New York: International Publishers, 1964), and the more analytical *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1998).

²⁶ Sarah Maza, *The Myth of The French Bourgeoisie: An Essay on the Social Imaginary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3-4, 162-66.

²⁷ Jerrold Seigel, *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life, 1830-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 89-96.

French property owners, men of affairs and political elites.²⁸ “The bourgeoisie is not a social class,” the historian Jules Michelet aptly noted in 1846, “but a position within society.”²⁹

The social pedigree associated with the rubric “bourgeois” was, by and large, a product of the political environment of the mid-nineteenth century. The political and social antagonisms stemming from the French Revolution persisted to agitate France well after the revolutionary movement came to its ambiguous close, and in the midst of such extreme unrest, traditional and established elites nurtured strong misgivings regarding the impact and consequences of democratic equality and popular sovereignty. Providing a case for the exclusion of the masses from politics, liberal ideologues warned of the deleterious influences that universal democracy and social equality posed for the stability of French society. “It is false that all men are equal,” François Guizot, one of the foremost liberal spokesmen, explained in 1863. “They are, on the contrary, unequal by nature as by situation, by spirit as by body.”³⁰ Highlighting the “organic inequality” which existed in nature,³¹ liberals argued that not all possessed the necessary intellect and “*capacité*” to participate in public life. Education, wealth and social distinction exhibited one’s ability to make judicious political decisions and conceptualize the greater social good outside of personal interest, and these qualities formed the basis of an open aristocracy which politicians and liberal critics associated directly with a new class in France, the bourgeoisie.³²

In the discourse of classical French liberalism, “bourgeois” demarcated an exclusive social group with political rights granted by virtue of their wealth. The mandatory poll tax

²⁸ David Garrioch, *The Formation of the Parisian Bourgeoisie, 1690-1830* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 266.

²⁹ Jules Michelet, *Le Peuple* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974), 132.

³⁰ François Guizot, *Histoire parlementaire de France* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1863), 1: xxi.

³¹ Victor Duruy, *Notes et souvenirs* (Paris: Hachette, 1901), 1:55.

³² On French liberal ideology, see: Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le Moment Guizot* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), 99-114; Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*, 147-50; Alan Pitt, “The Irrational Liberalism of Hippolyte Taine,” *The Historical Journal*, 41:4 (December 1998): 1040-41; Mark Hulliung, *Citizens and Citoyens: Republicans and Liberals in America and France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 47-50.

required for voting and holding political office effectively restricted political power to a small minority of the population, with references to the bourgeoisie serving to justify the type of elite rule prescribed by liberal ideology. As the liberal Charles de Rémusat asserted in 1834, with the ascension of the bourgeoisie to political power the middle class had been elevated to “a civil church [befitting] their true social rank.”³³ Such pronouncements gave substance to claims of bourgeois primacy and power during the mid-nineteenth century, defining a new aristocracy of probity and talent naturally suited for political leadership. “The bourgeoisie occupies the front of the stage in France,” one critic bluntly put it in 1837, “just as democracy does in the United States.”³⁴ Much as Sarah Maza has indicated, the French bourgeoisie was a product of a particular style of political discourse and language, one which constructed an image of the moderate and rational “bourgeois” individual and justified claims to power and authority.³⁵

Not surprising, opposition to the egregious class rule sanctioned by liberals encouraged a strong anti-bourgeois rhetoric which further gave definition, albeit in exceedingly negative and pejorative terms, to the idea of the French bourgeoisie during the 1840s. Increasing demands for political reform and democratization signified the most pronounced threat to elite power, culminating in the outbreak of a social revolution in 1848 which successfully challenged the dictates and ideology of bourgeois rule. With the declaration of universal manhood suffrage and the founding of a democratic republican regime in February 1848, the nominally bourgeois class of privileged voters which had constituted the backbone of the government’s support was swallowed up by the majority of peasants and workers virtually overnight. “If universal suffrage is admitted,” one journalist had warned as early as 1833, “the middle class disappears completely

³³ Archives Nationales [henceforth AN] 87 AP 15, “Discours prononce par M. De Rémusat,” 14 March 1834.

³⁴ Quoted in Rosanvallon, *Le Moment Guizot*, 120.

³⁵ Maza, *The Myth of The French Bourgeoisie*, 158-60.

from the political scene.”³⁶ So it was. Under the new republic, the language of social status and superiority employed by French elites was annulled, marking an end to the world of bourgeois privilege and exclusivity. “The bourgeoisie is dead,” Flaubert wrote while reflecting on the trend toward democracy taking place in the country. “It is now seated there amongst the populace.”³⁷

The advent of mass democracy brought into existence a new public discourse oriented around themes of equality and national sovereignty. In this milieu, the overt elitism and class rule promoted by liberals became unsustainable. “There is no longer in France . . . either a bourgeoisie or peasantry,” the political theorist Édouard Laboulaye remarked in 1863 when summing up the tenor of the new egalitarian political culture emerging in the country. “These are the names of old things long dead. In France there is only a single order and a single people. We are all citizens to the same degree.”³⁸ While elites hardly became ardent democrats overnight and in most cases continued to express concerns that mass democracy would jeopardize public order, the demands of a democratic political culture made defining a class of capable and natural leaders problematic. Democratization necessitated a new type of elite distinct from the notions of natural inequality and social privilege familiar to classical liberalism. If elites intended to maintain their influence, they would have to devise a new language and terminology capable of representing their identity and interests in accordance with the democratic aspirations of the period. The severe blow struck to classical liberalism in 1848 entailed a necessary reformation of bourgeois ideology, engendering a need to conceal real social relations and represent politics and society without regard to social division.³⁹

³⁶ Quoted in Jeremy D. Popkin, *Press, Revolution, and Social Identities in France, 1830-1835* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 98.

³⁷ Quoted in Françoise Mélonio, *Naissance et affirmation d'une culture nationale* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998), 211.

³⁸ Édouard Laboulaye, *Le Parti libéral* (Paris: Charpentier, 1863), x.

³⁹ Rosanvallon, *Le Moment Guizot*, 347-49.

Tout court, the advent of mass politics did symbolize the death of the bourgeoisie in France, as Flaubert anticipated. Confronted with a political culture prizing democracy and equality, elites could no longer represented themselves as an exclusive and particular “bourgeois” social group standing above the people. Over the course of the 1850s and 1860s, allusions to “capacity” or bourgeois primacy gradually became replaced by references to “modern society” and “modern civilization.” Unlike the terminology previously employed by classical liberals, modernity constituted a novel way of describing and labeling that relied upon themes of time and development rather than social and class distinctions. This shift from the social to the temporal accompanied a broad cultural transformation in which bourgeois identity gradually became supplanted by a universal modernity as elites espoused a new language and style of representation conforming to the demands of a democratic society. In this context, to speak of bourgeois modernity is a misconception. Modernity was the cultural construction that eclipsed the bourgeoisie within public discourse and inscribed elite identity within a new discursive framework.

Imagining The Modern Community

In 1867, Raimond de Miravals arrived in Paris from the Var, a Provençal department nestled in the extreme south-east corner of the country. A journalist by trade, Miravals was serving as a correspondent for the *L'Echo du Var*, a local newspaper which had assigned him to report on the Exposition Universelle being staged in the capital that year. Like so many others who attended the Exposition, Miravals expressed admiration for the industrial and scientific exhibitions flanking the Champs du Mars and rhapsodized on the “new era of civilization and progress” opening for humanity. The Exposition equally inspired an appreciation for the inventive spirit of

the modern era, in his opinion, demonstrating the triumphs made by industry, exploration and scientific advancement in the nineteenth century. “Man is never satisfied,” he wrote. “The thirst for the unknown, the passion for travel, the rage for discoveries which each day breed uncertainties and invite new problems: I succumb to this constant inclination which is especially the inclination of the current century.”⁴⁰

Public reception of the Exposition had been a chief consideration of the planning committee formed to organize the event. According to Victor Duruy, a leading committee member, the Exposition was intended to bolster awareness of French industry and science and reveal to the world that “the innumerable riches of industry come out of the chemists’ laboratory and the cabinet of physicians and naturalists like a river flowing from its source.”⁴¹ Educated Frenchmen hardly needed to be informed of this fact, however, as science, industry and manufacturing had already come to comprise a new trinity of progress in their minds, conjuring up images of a world rife with promise and unimaginable potential. “It is not an exaggeration to say that science contains humanity’s future,” claimed the theologian Ernest Renan, “that it alone can speak the words of destiny to him and reveal the way in which to reach his end.”⁴² Renan’s veneration of scientific advancement epitomized the “cult of science” currently in vogue among French intellectuals of the period. “Ask any good Frenchmen what he understands by ‘progress,’” opined Baudelaire. “He will answer that it is steam, electricity, and gas—miracles unknown to the Romans—whose discovery bears full witness to our superiority over the ancients.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Raimond de Miravals, *Causeries parisiennes* (Dragignan: P. Gimbert, 1867), 149, 101.

⁴¹ Duruy, *Notes et souvenirs*, 1:204.

⁴² Ernest Renan, *The Future of Science* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), 38.

⁴³ Charles Baudelaire, “Exposition universelle, 1855,” *Art in Paris: 1845-1862*, trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1965), 126.

The sense of rapid change and novelty seizing the French imagination found expression in a wide array of publications and genres, underscoring feelings of transcendence and restless energy. While the poet Victor Hugo extolled the panorama of modernity he found growing up around him, describing a world “whose arteries are railroads and whose nerves are electric wires,” expressions of wonder could be and often were tempered with more melancholic reflections as well.⁴⁴ Gazing upon a landscape of castles and crumbling monasteries, the conservative royalist Pierre-Simon Ballanche mournfully concluded that “these black towers crowned with crenellated stones must fall, these silent, tapering cloisters must be transformed into prisons or vast workshops for manufacturing. Our castles represent the time of knights and the feudal world. It is necessary that they disappear.”⁴⁵ Flaubert expressed the same sense of dislocation in his novels, albeit with more panache and artistic flair. In *The Sentimental Education*, he chose the image of Jesus Christ riding a steam engine through a virgin forest to symbolize sentiments of rapid change and novelty, conveying the impression of an irrevocable break with standard traditions and perceptions.⁴⁶ In this melange of things dead and things yet to be, the present appeared to the poet Alfred de Musset as a creature “half-mummy and half-foetus.” “One cannot know,” he lamented, “whether, at each step, one is treading on a seed or piece of refuse.”⁴⁷

Reflections on industry and science underscored the idea that the nineteenth century marked a period of unprecedented change and transformation. Such assumptions were commonly reinforced through observations on city life and urban environments where the vista of

⁴⁴ Victor Hugo, *Napoleon The Little* (New York: Sheldon, 1870), 301.

⁴⁵ Pierre-Simon Ballanche, “Essai sur les institutions sociales,” *Œuvres* (Paris: Bureau de l’Encyclopédie des Connaissances Utiles, 1833), 2:84.

⁴⁶ Gustave Flaubert, *The Sentimental Education*, trans., Douglass Parmée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 325.

⁴⁷ Alfred de Musset, *The Confession of a Child of the Century* (Westport: Hyperion, 1978), 8-9.

modernity seemingly came alive. Walking through Rouen, a traveler could find gothic spires, old churches and gable-ended houses adjacent to billowing smokestacks, newly-constructed train stations and the skeletal silhouettes of industrial cranes stenciled against the skyline.⁴⁸

Ruminating on French building projects in colonial Algiers, the military interpreter Ishmayel Urbain complained, “Soon the traveler will only find here a detestable copy of our French cities where the preoccupation of work and the noise and smoke of industry do not permit any repose or distraction.”⁴⁹ A walk through the streets of Paris in the 1860s elicited a similar experience. “This modern Paris . . . is a strange and totally new world . . .,” Hippolyte Taine surmised, “[where] the nervous machine is at once overworked and insatiable.”⁵⁰ As industrial and economic growth began to slowly transform the character and ambience of urban spaces, cities increasingly appeared to embody all the marvels as well as the vices of modern society, rendering the city the veritable locus of modernity.

Writers spared no amount of ink when it came to detailing the modern landscape coming into sharp relief around them, mixing lamentations for a certain way of life coming to an end in France with eulogies welcoming the arrival of a world vastly different from the past. Yet the world is not, as Leszek Kolakowski has indicated, reflected and “reproduced” in words and texts; on the contrary, it is “appropriated” and actively shaped through them.⁵¹ “Modern society” came alive through the words and imaginations of authors. Exposés, magazine articles and illustrations functioned as vehicles for the spread of these new sentiments, outfitting readers with a vocabulary and contextual understanding that transformed the modern into a collective and shared experience. To sketch the contours of a nominally modern world through language and

⁴⁸ Henry Blackburn, *Normandy Picturesque* (London: S. Low, Son and Marston, 1870), 189.

⁴⁹ *Journal des Débats*, 21 July 1839.

⁵⁰ Taine, *Essais*, 373, 378-79.

⁵¹ Leszek Kolakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 35.

texts was to give it a definition and reality of its own which an educated and literate French population could identify with, relate to, and comprehend. It is the world of words, Slavoj Žižek maintains, which creates the world of things because reality cannot represent itself. Social reality is constantly and necessarily mediated through the language which gives it symbolic meaning, shaping and dictating interpretations of society, history, and the world at large.⁵²

The textual nature of the modern signified, however, that it remained by and large the property of a narrow segment of the population. Books and newspapers were expensive in the nineteenth century. The average subscription rate for a journal cost between sixty and eighty francs at a time when agricultural workers earned no more than two francs and skilled workers no more than four francs per day.⁵³ Most publications remained beyond the means of workers and day laborers, even if they had the necessary literacy skills and leisure time to read them. As a primarily elite medium, texts reflected intellectual currents, social concerns, and topics of interests pertinent to educated society and readers. It was, therefore, unsurprising that convictions regarding the utility of scientific knowledge, the inexorable march of progress and the benefits of industry pervaded numerous journals, revues and books of the period. Philosophical musings, reports on industrial innovations and the economy, descriptions of urban life and sociability: these subjects were both topical and attractive to an elite readership increasingly encouraged to view their world as the *nec plus ultra* of man's endeavors and accomplishment.

"The true bond," Flaubert once wrote, "is that of language."⁵⁴ If "modern society" acquired its consistency in the realm of print, such representations similarly encouraged readers

⁵² Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 28, 45-49.

⁵³ Irene Collins, *The Government and the Newspaper, 1813-1881* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 91; Roger Price, *A Social History of Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1987), 160, 215.

⁵⁴ Gustave Flaubert, *Flaubert in Egypt*, trans., Francis Steegmuller (New York: Penguin, 1996), 161.

to associate and identify with these abstractions. To be “modern” implied participating in a certain culture and ascribing to a set of beliefs, values and practices shared by other like-minded individuals. Commonalities and mutual interests compelled men to think of themselves not necessarily as compatriots or social equals but as coevals inhabiting the same temporal and modern space.⁵⁵ Time, represented through a language of modernity, forged a bond between contemporaries, providing the basis for a type of imagined community which, constructed through the writings and declarations of cultural and political elites, became integral to one’s identity, persona and expectations.⁵⁶ There could be no foreigners among modern men because modernity professed a certain uniformity of moral sentiments, outlooks and common interests and experiences that bound coevals across both space and time. The praises sung to “modern society” composed the backdrop of a new social imaginary complete with its own discursive forms, identities and nuanced implications that were increasingly becoming central to the mental universe and parlance of elite society.

The vista characteristic of the modern, continually produced and reproduced in the books, journals and revues of the day, nurtured an understanding of the world that permeated the cultural discourse of nineteenth-century elites. In accenting the common culture, interests and sentiments shared by “modern” individuals, educated elites were instructed to view themselves as coevals inhabiting a unique time vastly different from the past. Such assumptions furnished a measure of social cohesions amongst a diverse stratum of society that defied the neat socio-economic homogeneity familiar to Marxist interpretations of the bourgeoisie. In the mentality of

⁵⁵ See: Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Objects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 23-30.

⁵⁶ I borrow this term from Benedict Anderson, whose principal focus concerned the imaginary and discursive nature of national identity and the nation-state. See: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

mid-nineteenth-century educated society, change and progress became definitive features of a collective modern experience.

At The Margins of Modernity

Arriving in the Algerian port of Sorta In 1860 to commence a six week journey through North Africa, Charles Thierry-Mieg, an Alsatian inventor associated with the French textile industry, took note of the “uncultivated, savage, primitive and inhospitable” environment surrounding him. A week into his trip, he traveled from Guelma to Constantine where he found an empty and desolate landscape like no other he had ever encountered. “More and more the surrounding landscape acquired a strange character. There were only barren and earthy hills, occasionally dotted with stones and slabs of rock A gray and arid surface, burnt soil, hardened by the pitiless summer, this desert that seemed condemned to perpetual sterility.”⁵⁷ Happening upon a throng of Arab tribesmen, Thierry-Mieg could not help but regard them with a sense of historical distance and detachment. “They are still in the Middle Ages,” he recorded soberly; “their degree of civilization has remained the same Whereas we have progressed the Arabs have remained stationary.”⁵⁸

While such observations were commonplace and testified to the Euro-centric and implicitly racist views inscribed within French colonial discourse, there remained something more to Thierry-Mieg’s assertion that the Arabs had remained “stationary” while Europeans had progressed. The French and the Arabs inhabited, he presumed, two divergent and qualitative times, prompting Thierry-Mieg to differentiate between the modern and progressive time of Europe and the medieval and static time of the Orient. Flaubert expressed a similar sentiment

⁵⁷ Charles Thierry-Mieg, *Six semaines en Afrique* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1861), 6, 102.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

during his trip to Egypt in the late 1840s, remarking on the decadence and mystique of “the old Orient, land of religion and flowing robes.”⁵⁹ Drawing liberally upon anthropological theories and orientalist stereotypes popularized throughout the nineteenth century, depictions of “the other” routinely took the form of temporal distance, offering a mirror image of the modern self.

Building upon the theories of leading anthropologists, critics and intellectuals readily subscribed to the belief that human development followed certain universal laws, construing the technological, social and intellectual disparities evident among differing cultures in evolutionary and stadial terms. The world was best understood, they argued, as a temporal mosaic in which less civilized and primitive societies coexisted alongside highly-developed and modern ones. In a world configured through notions of temporal pluralism and uni-linear evolutionary models, to encounter the primitive was tantamount to coming face to face with one’s distant ancestry and traversing the centuries and millennia bounding a common genealogy.⁶⁰ It was through this understanding of the primitive that the possibilities of the modern came into sharp relief and assumed form, that men recognized themselves as eminently modern and superior. The modern man may have believed himself to be centuries ahead of the “savage,” but these conceptual distinctions belied a troubling interdependence: the modern man needed the savage to imagine his own existence and identity. Conceptually, these identities may have been mutually exclusive; in reality, however, they operated as part of the same discursive formation. Elite self-fashioning not only demanded a conception of the modern to valorize and celebrate; it equally required an object against which the possibilities of the modern could be projected and exemplified.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Flaubert, *Flaubert in Egypt*, 73.

⁶⁰ Matsuda, *The Memory of the Modern*, 12; François Furet, “History and ‘Savages’” *Rain*, 8 (May-June 1975): 4.

⁶¹ See: Susan Carol Rogers, “Good to Think: The ‘Peasant’ in Contemporary France,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 60:2 (April 1987): 56-63. For theories on identity formation in general, see: Ernesto Laclau, “The Death and Resurrection of the Theory of Ideology,” *MLN*, 112:3 (April 1997): 316; Ezequiel Adamovsky, “Euro-Orientalism and the Making of the Concept of Eastern Europe in France, 1810-1880,” *The Journal of Modern History*, 77 (September 2005): 591-92.

As identities became increasingly mapped and constructed according to concepts of time and temporality, labels such as “primitive” and “savage” became integral to the cultural vocabulary of nineteenth-century elites and served to reconfigure both racial and social differences in new and vital ways.⁶² The old language of “bourgeois” industriousness and capacity employed by liberal ideologues to justify their brand of class rule in France proved adaptable to the new tone espoused by elites and accommodated the needs of racial subjugation and subalternization essential to shaping power relations in France’s emergent colonial periphery. According to the Martinican medical expert Étienne Ruzé in 1860, the “savage” found beyond the confines of Europe possessed “a horror of work” which perpetually left him deprived of the benefits of modern society.⁶³ It was not shocking that Hommaire de Hell, a colonial reformer disposed to see “the Negro [as] essentially lazy,” would insist that to “moralize this race . . . there is only a single path: *work*.”⁶⁴ Self-identified modern men insisted they possessed the intelligence and work ethic essential to a productive society while less-evolved cultures stagnated due to sloth and ignorance, demonstrating, as Émile Littré asserted in 1867, that “work”—that cardinal virtue of the bourgeoisie—comprised “the base, the law, the glory of modern humanity.”⁶⁵

If “bourgeois” had implied a restrictive social identity and elite group in France that no longer comported with the dictates of a new democratic political culture, ostensibly bourgeois values increasingly came to be expressed in universal terms, and concepts like modernity and

⁶² Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 124-29.

⁶³ *Bulletins de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* (Paris: Victor Masson, 1860), 1:349.

⁶⁴ Edouard Hommaire de Hell, “Coup d’œil sur la condition de la classes noire dans les colonies françaises des Antilles,” *Revue de l’Orient* (Paris: Delavigne, 1858), 8:225, and “Coup d’œil sur la condition de la classe noire,” *Revue de l’Orient* (1859), 9: 44. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁵ Émile Littré, “Politique,” *La Philosophie positive* (Paris: Germer Ballière, 1867), 1:28.

civilization furnished a persuasive means of discursively representing this universality.⁶⁶ It was not surprising that the “civilizing” and “modernizing” objectives of French colonialism corresponded with certain “bourgeois” interests predicated upon economic development and improvement.⁶⁷ Yet this modernizing initiative was hardly restricted to the distant worlds of the colonies. The landscape symbolic of modern progress and industry vaunted by savants, intellectuals, and politicians never extended far beyond the domains of French cities and towns, and *la France profonde*—the majority of rural areas making up continental France—could, at times, seem closer to the desolate and wild terrain of Africa than Europe. Visiting the department of the Landes located in the south-west in 1856, an education inspector submitting a report to Paris depicted a desolate landscape, noting, “the eye loses itself as in an ocean, never encountering any habitation and seeing only forests extending far without limits.”⁶⁸ The supposed pre-modern milieu of the colonies was not all that distinct from the under-developed and “savage” landscapes characteristic of the French countryside, and state administrators throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century were never modest when it came to noting the vital need of modernizing rural French society. “It is essential that not a single corner of French soil be bereft of these grand currents of richness and prosperity,” the interior minister, the Duc de Persigny, dictated in 1856. “In a word, French civilization is still incomplete; it is necessary to bring it to fruition.”⁶⁹

Perceptions of rural autarky and backwardness suffused travel accounts through the countryside during the nineteenth century as rail construction and roads opened up *la France*

⁶⁶ Popkin, *Press, Revolution and Social Identities in France*, 70; Rosanvallon, *Le Moment Guizot*, 347-48.

⁶⁷ Osama W. Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity: Saint-Simonians and the Civilizing Mission in Algeria* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 13.

⁶⁸ AN F 17 9327, “Rapport général des la statistique de l’enseignement primaire dans le departement des Landes,” 1 May 1856.

⁶⁹ AN 45 AP 19, “Discours au concours régional de Roanne,” May 1864.

profonde to urbanites, and the sense of foreignness at home that such encounters engendered was telling. Village and city, just like metropole and colony, represented, as the economist Adolphe Blanqui claimed in 1851, “two completely opposite ways of life.”⁷⁰ This opposition remained tied to conceptual and qualitative differences that mapped out modern and pre-modern spaces. If French cities were hailed as bastions of modernity, the provinces were popularly seen as static and resistant to change. Writing in the mid-1860s, the liberal pamphleteer Eugène Ténot clearly saw “two juxtaposed people” living side by side on the national soil, “one burning with a new spirit, the other languishing in another century.”⁷¹ Urban observers regarded French rurals with the same detachment and distance applied to colonial subjects.⁷² Observing the prandial habits, dancing and festivities of Breton peasants in Rennes, Taine compared them to Arabs celebrating after a feast, remarking curtly, “mores remain very primitive here.” Heading southward to Toulouse, the native inhabitants of the region became even more peculiar. “In seeing them move and approach,” he noted, “one feels that they are in the presence of another race.”⁷³

Social critics had few reservations in applying anthropological and colonial categories to their fellow Frenchmen and blurring the conceptual boundaries that separated metropole and colony. Often exaggerated and erroneous, these representations did serve an important ideological function. As the antithesis of the modern individual, peasant and indigene alike could not logically be expected to possess any agency in the nominally modern society envisaged as the repository of the future. “Progress and amelioration cannot be achieved by the initiative of society in its entirety,” the republican social critic Grégoire Wyruboff explained in 1868. “They

⁷⁰ Quoted in Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 9.

⁷¹ Eugène Ténot, *Le suffrage universel et les paysans* (Paris: Librairie Centrale, 1865), 13.

⁷² James R. Lehning, *Peasant and French: Cultural Contact in Rural France During the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 3-4.

⁷³ Hippolyte Taine, *Carnets de Voyage: Notes sur la province, 1863-1865* (Paris: Hachette, 1913), 58, 77.

must be the work of some individuals who are enlightened enough to understand necessity and strong enough to vanquish the passive resistance of an immense majority that ignores the path it must walk.”⁷⁴

Rejecting the explicit class rule prescribed by French liberals, “enlightened” individuals claimed their authority in the name of “modern society” and progress, concepts which did not, at least theoretically, undermine the egalitarian values of a democratic French society. Inscribing difference within a discourse of time and development had the benefit of eliding and altogether glossing over social and racial distinctions, underwriting a style of social representation which was egalitarian in principle while elitist in practice. Social evolutionary thinking consistently remained premised upon the belief that less-evolved peoples could, under the proper circumstances, catch up with and be assimilated into the modern time of their superiors. As one pro-colonial publicist alleged in 1867, “by adopting the methods employed by the people furthest along the path of progress . . . a retrograde people can make up the ground and diminish the sacrifices that lost time has imposed on them.”⁷⁵ Phrased differently, primitizing certain groups offered a moral justification for imposing certain values and social practices on outside cultures.

“Nothing can hold back modern thinking, progressive civilization and progressive science,” Littré professed in 1852. “At each step, in spite of the numerous incidences or misfortunes which may befall a particular nation, we see that innovation advances and backwardness declines.”⁷⁶ The logic of a universalized modernity imbued elites and social reformers with a profound sense of moral authority and purpose, encouraging hopes that rudimentary and “savage” groups would adopt the lessons of their modern counterparts and progressively abandon their archaic and “primitive” qualities. In the terms prescribed by the new

⁷⁴ G. Wyrouboff, “L’enseignement libre,” *La Philosophie positive* (1868) 2:451-52.

⁷⁵ M. Étourneau, *L’Algérie faisant appel à La France* (Paris: Grassart, 1867), 136.

⁷⁶ Émile Littré, *Conservation Révolution Positivisme* (Paris: Ledrange, 1852), 90.

language of French elitism, subaltern groups were faced with the choice of assimilation or social marginalization. In either event, the imposition of modernity implied that the new society to come would unconditionally belong, both socially and culturally, to a certain group of men bolstering urban forms of politics, knowledge and sociability under the pretext of modernity.

Savages of Civilization

Making a tour of the Parisian environs after visiting the Exposition Universelle, Raimond de Miravals came across a spectacle on the periphery of the city seemingly at odds with the technological innovations and scientific demonstration he had recently witnessed in the exhibition halls of the Palais de l'Industrie: impoverished workers, streets filled with peddlers picking through rag shops and destitute shanty towns stretching out toward the horizon. "I have seen hidden miseries . . .," he recorded soberly taking in the sight, "those savages of civilization camped out on the deserts of the arrondissements."⁷⁷ Images of rustic peasants stuck in their ways and colonial tribes steeped in primordial ignorance may have offered convenient representations against which the material advancement and reason prized by urban elites could be valorized and held up as models for the rest of the world to emulate. Yet the optimistic narrative of progress and inexorable social development that underpinned such conceptions often obscured a darker picture. Modernity was capable of generating its own distinct forms of savagery and barbarism, and these "savages of civilization" could be just as loathsome as the "primitive" populations beyond the confines of cities and, arguably, more menacing.

The growing urbanization of French elites during the nineteenth century occurred in tandem with the emergence of an urban poor subject to novel forms of factory discipline,

⁷⁷ Miravals, *Causeeries parisiennes*, 145.

deflated wages, slum-like living conditions, hunger and dearth on a daily basis.⁷⁸ The turn toward an industrialized economy engendered new disparities in wealth and power and, in turn, new social classes and divisions which radicals and conservatives alike recognized as the quintessence of “modern society.”⁷⁹ Class conflict, increasingly evident in the rise of militant worker movements and socialist agitation during the 1830s and 1840s, “defined modern history,” as the liberal statesmen and historian François Guizot claimed.⁸⁰ While elites fashioned themselves vanguards of modernity, such universal pretension concealed the fact that modern society was not solely made in their image. The bourgeois social order was perennially under threat and resistance could and frequently did assume violent and confrontational forms that periodically transformed cities, the imagined epicenters of modern progress and civilization, into sites of carnage, violence and instability not unlike those encountered in the colonies.⁸¹

Nineteenth-century social critics and officials were not oblivious to the fact that major industrial centers offered spectators examples of both the marvels and horrors of modernity. Describing Paris in 1852, Gautier expressed disgust at the deplorable living conditions and grime that could be found if one bothered to travel beyond the city center. “Three-quarters of the streets are only networks of black and fetid filth as in the times of the starkest barbarism,” he claimed. “No traces of art or elegance . . . , boxes of plaster with squares cut into them constitute what one

⁷⁸ See: Alain Cottureau, “The Distinctiveness of Working-Class Culture in France,” in Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg, eds. *Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 118-40; Price, *People and Politics in France*, 271-78.

⁷⁹ P. J. Proudhon, “De la capacité politique des classes ouvrières,” *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1924), 4:96.

⁸⁰ François Guizot, *Histoire de la civilisation en Europe*, ed., Pierre Rosanvallon (Paris: Hachette, 1985), 182.

⁸¹ For works on French labor militancy, see: Jill Harsin, *Barricades: The war of the Streets in Revolutionary Paris* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002); Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); William H. Sewell, *Work and revolution in France: The Language of Labor from The Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 194-272; Maza, *The Myth of the Bourgeoisie*, 161-192. For Works on Algeria and colonial pacification, see: Jennifer E. Sessions, *By Sword and Plow: France and the Conquest of Algeria* (Ithaca: Cornell university Press, 2011); Jacques Frémeaux, *Les bureaux arabes dans l'Algérie de la conquête* (Paris: Donoël, 1993), 114-44; Anthony Thrall Sullivan, *Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, France and Algeria, 1789-1849: Politics, Power and The Good Society* (Hamden: Archon, 1983); Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*.

calls a house in the nineteenth century, in this city that claims to be a modern Athens, the queen of civilization!”⁸² These conditions certainly provided cause for concern, and not simply on humanitarian grounds either. “The persistence of base habits can be explained in part by the permanence of insalubrious and sinister quarters,” wrote Charles Monselet. “The ugly calls forth the wicked.”⁸³ Under such circumstances, urban slums served as the breeding grounds for a “class of men whose lack of education and precarious lifestyle places them in a state of dangerous hostility to society,” as the influential liberal daily *Journal des Débats* warned in 1832.⁸⁴ These and similar opinions permeated leading periodicals and social-scientific studies of the day, corroborating the image of an urban poor that was degenerate, pathological, and a threat to social order and stability.⁸⁵

Yet these depictions went further. Writing in the midst of an ill-fated Lyonnais worker uprising staged in 1831, the journalist Saint-Marc Girardin spelled out the grave danger that worker radicalism posed to the country, apprising his reader, “The barbarians who threaten society are not in the Caucasus or the steppes of Tartary; they are in the suburbs of our manufacturing cities.”⁸⁶ Hannibal was not now at the gates, in Girardin’s opinion, and civilization itself hung in the balance. A state-sponsored inquiry into pauperism conducted in 1840 spelled out the evident dangers posed by the “extreme misery” suffered by the urban poor on a daily basis, cautioning that the insalubrious environment and lack of education found amongst the working classes could provoke “a relapse into savagery.”⁸⁷ While industrialized labor was, in theory, a product of the modern society valorized by elites, the immediate

⁸² Théophile Gautier, *Caprices et Zigzags* (Paris: Victor Lecou, 1852), 309.

⁸³ Monselet, *Les Ruines de Paris*, 2:91.

⁸⁴ *Journal des Débats*, 10 July 1832.

⁸⁵ See: Louis Chevalier, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses à Paris pendant la première moitié du XIXe siècle* (Plon: Paris, 2002).

⁸⁶ Quoted in Popkin, *Press, Revolution, and Social Identities in France*, 2.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Mélonio, *Naissance et affirmation d’une culture nationale*, 196.

environment, base habits and squalid lifestyle of workers prognosticated an evolutionary reversal, effectively denying them a nominally “modern” identity. Applying the language and ideology of colonialism to metropolitans, these “savages of civilization” were re-conceptualized as an inferior race, making indigent and *indigène* practically synonymous. The reformer Henri Lecouturier did not mince words when comparing the meandering existence of Parisian day laborers to nomadic Arab tribesmen, contending that the majority of inhabitants in the city owned no property of their own and frequently migrated from residence to residence in any given year. “Paris is a camp,” Lecouturier summarized, “each of its houses a tent, and its population nomadic.”⁸⁸

The remaking of post-revolutionary society was concurrent with the renewal of French imperial aspirations abroad, and the confluence of these two processes furnished a new context and language for defining deviant groups and proposing solutions to disorder at home just as much as in France’s new North African periphery. “Algeria and the revolution of 1830 are inextricably linked together,” Prosper Enfantin noted in 1840. “They are two twins attached at the trunk which must either live or die together.”⁸⁹ By the dawn of the 1840s, metropolitan and colonial officials alike were coming to see themselves as leaders obliged to assume responsibility for the rational and efficient management of unruly and subaltern populations, and the increasingly convergent objectives associated with domestic stability and overseas conquest augured the “colonialization” of national politics and security.⁹⁰ Groups at odds with the social values, mores and lifestyle shared by enlightened men—what political and social critics broadly interpreted as “modern civilization”—were inscribed within a temporalized identity regime

⁸⁸ Henri Lecouturier, *Paris incompatible avec la République* (Paris: Desloges, 1848), 65.

⁸⁹ Enfantin, *Colonisation de l’Algérie*, 457.

⁹⁰ See: Abi-Mershed, *Apostles of Modernity*, 25.

distancing them from modern coevals called upon to rule over and govern barbaric and wild populations.

The colonial terminologies employed by elites equated urban workers with an enemy that, in the opinion of the influential Algerian adviser Baron Jérôme Frédéric David, “knows no other rules than violence . . . and is unfamiliar with justice to redress [his] grievances.”⁹¹ Such language also evoked the drama of colonial warfare and France’s “civilizing” initiatives in North Africa which interpreted conflict as a heroic struggle between the forces of modern progress and Oriental decadence, between civilization and barbarism. “Subjugating barbarians is a useful act to civilization,” instructed the jurist René Morin in 1854, “and can be beneficial and laudatory if we elevate them to the level of a stable people [*peuples policés*].”⁹² Such injunctions not only justified imposing discipline and institutions on populations that were, by their very nature, believed to be inherently unstable and prone to violence; they also rationalized the use of brute force in carrying out this “moral conquest.” As Emperor Napoleon III candidly explained, “Civilization, although having for its aim the moral improvement and material wellbeing of the greatest number, progresses . . . like an army. Its victories are not obtained without sacrifices and victims.”⁹³ The triumph of modern society required nothing less than neutralizing the peril of “barbarism,” the scourge of modern, civilized existence.

These perceptions were seemingly validated in the summer of 1848 when rampant unemployment, political instability and the failure of government-sponsored social reforms prompted a working-class insurrection in Paris that left a death toll of some 1,400 in its wake. Horrified critics reviled the so-called “Red Days of June” as an attempt to “roll back civilization”

⁹¹ *Annales du Sénat et du Corps législatif* (Paris: L’Administration du Moniteur Universel, 1861), 2:107.

⁹² René Morin, *Civilisation. Unité* (Saumur: P. Godet, 1854), 71.

⁹³ *Discours, messages et proclamations de l’Empereur* (Paris: Henri Plon, 1860), 348.

and create a “barbaric society.”⁹⁴ Writing on the violence and slaughter that engulfed the capital, Henri Lecouturier described the worker revolt as “a new invasion of barbarians,” a war of the disinherited and debased against the civilized and privileged.⁹⁵ The participation of the Armée d’Afrique in subduing the June insurrection only further highlighted these colonial undertones. Generals Juchault de la Moricière and Louis-Eugène Cavaignac—both of whom had acquired notoriety serving in Algeria—were summoned back from North Africa just as the Parisian revolt erupted and given full powers to crush the rebellion and restore order by any means necessary. For the next six months, Cavaignac, de la Moricière and other members of the Algerian command were hailed as the “saviors” of the republic and rewarded with key positions in the government to ensure order. Algerian journalists could hardly fail to note the evident irony of the situation. As one writer for the Algerian daily *Akhbar* wryly commented, “France has not wanted to assimilate Algeria and now Algeria is on the verge of assimilating France!”⁹⁶

In the coming years, efforts to control urban workers and curb civil unrest would increasingly come to figure in the “modernizing” projects implemented by the state. Under the Second Empire, old slums conducive to crime and disease were torn down and replaced by large avenues and boulevards, public parks, gardens and ornate buildings housing upscale residents.⁹⁷ The narrow, medieval streets and working-class quarters which had consistently proven to be strongholds for urban insurrectionists in time of revolution were destroyed and replaced by wide

⁹⁴ Adolph Thiers in *La Presse*, 25 July 1849; Frédéric Bastiat, *Ce qu’on voit et ce qu’on ne voit pas ou l’économie politique en une leçon* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1850), 39.

⁹⁵ Lecouturier, *Paris incompatible avec la République*, 73.

⁹⁶ *Akhbar*, 12 June 1848.

⁹⁷ There have been numerous works dealing with the urban projects of the imperial regime, inviting a plethora of interpretations as to the objectives and intentions of Napoleon III and the Second Empire. Howard Pinkney’s *Napoleon III and the Rebuilding of Paris* offers a pragmatic and realist explanation of the imperial public work projects. David P. Jordan has noted the strategic aspects implicit in the Bonapartist building projects in *Transforming Paris: The Life and Times of Baron Haussman* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan, 1995). For an interpretation corroborating the idea of “social engineering” carried out by the imperial regime, see: Christiansen, *Paris Babylon*, 93-116. For a rejection of the socially-minded interpretations surrounding French urbanization, see: Robinow, *French Modern*, 77-95.

public spaces easily accessible to troops and the gendarmerie.⁹⁸ Attempts to relegate a “savage” working class to the margins of French cities were, moreover, consistent with the appropriation of urban colonial spaces across the Mediterranean. With the temporary pacification of native resistance in Algeria, colonial administrators oversaw the demolition of Moorish buildings in North African cities, clearing out the native residents and erecting European-inspired edifices for the newly-arriving colonists expected to supplant the indigenous urban populations.⁹⁹ “The Oriental has little by little been transformed into a modern city,” the journalist Augustin Marquand could declare by 1869 as he gazed out over the landscape of Algiers, “and the civilization of France has come to implant itself heroically in the heart of barbarism.”¹⁰⁰

More than mere colonial braggadocio, Marquand’s assertion was a testament to the state’s efforts to construct the topography of modernity and the boundaries it signified, actively bringing into existence the “modern” metropolis envisaged by elites. It was primarily due to Napoleon III’s urbanization campaign that the cleric Antoine Arbousse-Bastide could extol Paris as the “capital of the modern world” during his trip in 1857.¹⁰¹ Through the refashioning of urban spaces, “modern civilization” acquired a geographic and spatial dimension within French territories that not only symbolized the dramatic divergence of past and present, but also reinforced the temporal antinomies vital to modernity’s imaginative social geography. As Eugène Ténôt tendentiously observed in 1865: “All that which has, turn in turn, moved and animated the people of our cities remains absolutely foreign to [the people of the countryside].”¹⁰² By consequence, urban culture became equated with modern culture, the

⁹⁸ D.P. Jordan, “Baron Haussmann and Modern Paris,” *American Scholar* 61:1 (Winter 1992): 100-14.

⁹⁹ Nabila Oulebsir, *Les usages du patrimoine: monuments, musées et politique coloniale en Algérie, 1830-1930* (Paris: editions de la Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, 2004), 10-11.

¹⁰⁰ Augustin Marquand, “Alger et ses environs,” *Akhbar*, 14 February 1869.

¹⁰¹ Antoine-François Arbousse-Bastide, *A propos de tout quelque chose, ou mes impressions à Paris* (Paris: Meyrueis, 1857), 15.

¹⁰² Ténôt, *Le suffrage universel et les paysans*, 13.

significance of which became strikingly apparent as the urban landscape and forms of leisure, entertainment and sociability it encouraged came to furnish the substance of the modernist aesthetic.¹⁰³

The dichotomies which structured a new elite sense of self were, however, only essential as long as they were useful to rationalizing certain power relationships conducive to democratic rule. A chronic suspicion of the working classes and the threat they posed to the social order persisted throughout the century, and this ultimately compelled French political elites to rely on the support of the rural peasantry in sustaining a conservative democracy. To this end, the conventional image of the rural “savage” proved incongruous with elite objectives, and it was unsurprising that in the wake of the Paris Commune leading republicans would seek to rehabilitate the image of the peasant and associate the rural world directly with the interests and progressive values of the *nouvelles couches social*.¹⁰⁴ The transformation—both real and imagined—of *la France profonde* under the Third Republic revealed the extent to which modernity was a construction shaped and re-shaped through the discourse of elites as the cultural representation of the archaic peasant was replaced with that of the modern citizen.¹⁰⁵ If scholars have traditionally accorded a significant role to mass participation in defining a process of “political modernization,” the republican “synthesis” of the late nineteenth century urges further examination into the discursive formations and cultural representations imbedded within the very concept of modern politics itself.

¹⁰³ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 34-66; David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Mary Gluck, *Popular Bohemia: Modernism and Urban Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁴ Lehning, *Peasant and French*, 208-10.

¹⁰⁵ Chloé Gaboriaux, *La République en quête de citoyens: Les Républicains français face au bonapartisme rural, 1848-1880* (Paris: Presse de la Fondation Nationales des Sciences Politique, 2010), 337-39.

The Archeology of Modernity

The existence of social groups is dependent upon the discourses and narratives that shape them.¹⁰⁶ Yet in a political culture predisposed to view social hierarchies and distinctions with suspicion, the traditional means of articulating group and social identities necessitated a new style of social representation. Modernity offered both a compelling language and story for conceptualizing a particular culture and lifestyle in temporal and historically-specific terms, permitting self-fashioned modern men to express their superiority and social primacy within the framework of a nominally egalitarian culture and polity. The idiom of newness popularized in nineteenth-century France helped construct a series of social and geographic boundaries which organized identities and power relations in a society being transformed by democratic politics and revived colonial aspirations. As elites began to speak through a language of time and temporal distance, they gave embodiment to the idea of an imagined modern community, furnishing notions of a shared time and culture which would provide a measure of cohesions amongst a diverse stratum of society that defied the socio-economic homogeneity central to Marxist interpretations of the bourgeoisie.

Resting upon a conceptual antinomy between the “modern” and “primitive,” temporal identities offered an effective rationale for a new form of discursive power that eschewed direct references to categories of class and race and collapsed them within a discourse of time that assigned a leading role to self-identified vanguards of progress and human development. Accusations of deficiency and social atavism made up a common language of exclusion and ascribed subaltern identities to those who remained hopelessly out of touch with the currents of industry, science and progress valued by urban elites. Inscribed within these juxtapositions and temporal identities was, therefore, a powerful legitimization for forms of social power and

¹⁰⁶ Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoisie*, 6-7.

control that deviated from the established discourse of French liberalism and bourgeois primacy. If the dictates of modernity have conventionally implied a marked “bourgeois” worldview and ideology, this denouement invites a more nuanced appraisal. In the outlooks of French social and cultural elites, modernity signified the absence of an explicitly bourgeois world, even if only to reinterpret bourgeois identity, interests and values in exceedingly universal and oblique terms.

At its most elemental level, “modern society” signified a rejection of the cultural pluralism and diversity that exist in the present, contrasting a monolithic modernity against a variety of superannuated and historicized forms. Construing identities and social relations through notions of anthropological time, the new language of elitism transformed alterior cultures and societies into little more than artifacts destined to be effaced by the progressive movement of history, a process broadly understood as the colonization of primitive spaces by modernity. Universal in its scope and conceptualization yet emblematic of a minority of the population, modernity constituted the exclusive preserve of a privileged group invested with a mission to modernize the primitive and conscript outsiders into the confines of modern life.

Up until relatively recent, scholarship on modernity remained in the shadow of this modern monolith, denoting a process patterned on European economic and social development during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹⁰⁷ Yet as Timothy Mitchell has observed, one of the chief characteristics of modernity has been its “autocentric picture of itself as the expression of a universal certainty” which has largely relegated non-Western countries to the margins of history.¹⁰⁸ It might be added, moreover, that this narrative was largely prefigured by nineteenth-century actors who used similar criteria to construct and articulate their own modernity against

¹⁰⁷ Anthony Giddens has assessed this process, defining modernity as the “modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence.” See: *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 1.

¹⁰⁸ Timothy Mitchell, “Introduction,” in *Questions of Modernity*, ed., Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xi.

the “savage” and “primitive” others they found surrounding them. To dissect the ideological dimensions of modern time and assess how historical actors utilized temporal conceptions to orient and structure their world is to also challenge the essential chronologies which have underpinned our categorization of historical phenomena. Such a methodology not only has the potential to illuminate the power structures inscribed in our understandings of modern time, but also portends to liberate modernity from its Euro-centric tyranny organized around themes of development, modernization, and capitalism. While such a history may, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has claimed, “look towards its own death,” it also holds the potential of dispelling the myths of the Enlightenment and imaging the world in new and radically heterogeneous terms.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 31, 46.